

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ALEXANDRA PALACE

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Name:	ALEXANDRA PALACE
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Haringey (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.593790 Longitude: -0.12947263 National Grid Reference: TQ 29667 89984 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001253 Date first listed: 09-May-1995

Details

A public park laid out by Alexander McKenzie and opened in 1863.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

On his death in 1856, Thomas Rhodes' grandchildren inherited Tottenham Wood Farm, a large dairy farm between the villages of Muswell Hill, Wood Green and Hornsey. Influenced by the success of the Crystal Palace (1851), they drew up a scheme for a similar venture for a north London Palace of the People. The site was described as 'undulating and well timbered with abundant springs and water', and the situation with its extensive and beautiful views was considered 'remarkably healthy' (The Times, 12 November 1858). Of the 450 acres (187.5ha), 150 acres (62.5ha) was to be set aside as park, and the remaining 300 acres (125ha) was sold for building to finance the project. By 1858, a layout of the grounds had been submitted by Mr John Spencer of Bowood, but nothing came of these early plans. Mr Francis Fuller then made a detailed survey of Muswell Hill Park, dated 1860, with a view to opening the park as an amusement centre, with a building to rival the Crystal Palace of which he had been manager for three years. Fuller failed to raise the necessary funding and his scheme was also shelved.

In 1863, the 'Alexandra Park Committee' was formed with the purpose of acquiring the land in order to lay it out as a place for public recreation and amusement. The exhibition building from the Great International Exhibition of 1862 was at the time being taken down at South Kensington, and this was bought to the site and re-erected. Financial difficulties meant that the Palace was not opened until 1873. Sixteen days after the formal opening, it burnt down. Rebuilding to the designs of a Mr Johnson started at once and the new Palace was opened in 1875, many new features having been added to the park. The 200 acre (c 83ha) park which surrounded the Palace was opened in July 1863 and included 10 acres (c 4ha) of the grounds of the adjacent Grove estate, purchased in 1863. The layout was designed by Alexander McKenzie, who chose an informal landscape style, in direct contrast to the formal approach used at the Crystal Palace, and kept in view that the place was a park rather than a flower garden, and so required general effects rather than minute detail.

Efforts to improve the financial situation of the series of companies who ran the Palace resulted in parliamentary powers being obtained in 1877 to sell off 80 acres (c 33ha) of the grounds north of the Palace for housing. The land to the west of Alexandra Park Road, including what became Grove Avenue, was sold off in the late 1870s and used for housing. Bills in the 1880s and

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1890s to sell off the whole of the park for building were however unsuccessful. Land to the east of the northern end of The Avenue was also later sold, with the subsequent development of Vallance and Elgin Roads; houses were also built to either side of The Avenue itself.

Following an Act of Parliament, in 1901 the Alexandra Palace and Park Trust was set up, administered by the local authorities. It required that the Trustees maintain the Palace and Park and keep them 'available for the free use and recreation of the public forever'. Only 173 acres (c 72ha) were purchased, despite the 1864 Act which had specified that 240 acres (100ha) were to be devoted to public recreation in perpetuity. In 1935, the BBC leased the eastern part of the Palace; the first public transmissions were made from here in 1936. In 1967, the Palace and park were handed over to the Greater London Council. In 1980, the Palace again caught fire, the damage being followed by a programme of restoration and development by Haringey Borough Council.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Alexandra Park, c 76ha, lies to the north of Hornsey, north-east of Muswell Hill and to the west of Wood Green. The site is surrounded by dense housing except to the east where the boundary is formed by the railway line. The Palace stands on a natural platform with extensive views over London to the south. The land falls steeply from the platform to the south-east and north-east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the park from the north is at the south end of The Avenue and leads directly to the terrace on the north side of Alexandra Palace. As first laid out, the park was entered via the gate off the west end of Alexandra Park Road, and The Avenue, lined with chestnuts, led through the park.

A second entrance is situated at the south end of Bedford Road at the north-east corner of the site. From here a drive leads south-west across the site to the north-east corner of the Palace platform.

There are also entrances from the north off Alexandra Park Road; into the west side of the park from the south end of Grove Avenue; and north from the junction of Muswell Hill and Priory Road, into the south end of the park. The entrance from Duke's Avenue, under the railway arch, was opened in 1906, mainly to provide access from Muswell Hill to the new tram terminus.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The original Alexandra Palace was the exhibition building from the Great International Exhibition of 1862 which was re-erected in Alexandra Park and opened in 1873. It burnt down sixteen days after the opening but was rebuilt by Meeson and Johnson and re-opened in 1875. The building was again destroyed by fire in 1980. Alexandra Palace (listed grade II) was restored and re-opened in 1988 and now provides facilities for exhibitions, conferences, and an ice-rink.

The Palace stands on a natural platform c 76m above the level of the railway to the east, from where there are extensive views. Originally at the centre of the park, due to subsequent housing development the Palace now stands towards the west side of the site.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The Palace forms the focus of the park. To the south-east, the ground slopes steeply down towards the southern boundary. When laid out, this was set with a pattern of informal walks leading down through lawns set with specimen trees, shrubs, and informal bedding. The arrangement has since been simplified. Due east of the Palace, a miniature golf course was added in the 1920s, one of several sports facilities put in at this time. On the upper slopes of the park north of this is an oval, hedge-enclosed rose garden at the centre of which is a fountain, moved here following the fire in 1980 from its original site in the Italian Garden which occupied the courtyard of the Palace between the Great Hall and the western conservatory. On the level ground at the foot of the hill is a race course (opened in 1868), the centre of which is now used as a cricket ground. Between the rose garden and the east entrance is the site of the Banqueting Hall and former diving pavilion and tank.

To the north of the Palace is a substantial terrace, c 300m long by c 50m wide, supported by Italianate arcades. This covered the new railway station (closed in 1954) from which a branch line ran to Highgate, giving a through-connection to King Cross and City termini. Beyond the northern end of this feature a substantial area of hard standing has been put in, used for events and car parking.

The main feature in the northern part of the park is the irregular boating lake which lies immediately north of the Palace. This was one of a series of ornamental pools formed by the damming of the stream which originally ran down the western boundary of the site. Originally it formed the setting for a water village, constructed on piles within it. The rest of the lakes were lost as

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part of the sale of land in the late 1870s. Until the 1880s a permanent circus, with provision for seating an audience of 3000, was situated to the east of The Avenue. The land was sold for housing and developed in the 1880s.

To the south-west of the Palace, the Park continues beyond Grove Avenue as an area known as The Grove, linking the site to Muswell Hill station. A miniature Japanese village, exhibited at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, was re-erected in this area, placed in its own miniature landscape laid out by a Japanese gardener. It was burnt down in 1897, to be replaced, in the 1920s, by tennis courts. In 1911, a chalet was built in The Grove to accompany the bandstand which had already been put up. In the 1920s, a new avenue was planted and an area was made for dancing.

Although the site has been subject to a number of alterations, the arrangement of the original path system can still be traced in most areas of the park.

REFERENCES

The Times, 12 November 1858 Illustrated London News, 16 July 1859 Haringey History Bulletin, no.29 (1988) B Elliott, Victorian Gardens (1986)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1873 2nd edition published 1894-6 3rd edition published 1920

Description written: March 1999 Register Inspector: CB Edited: May 2000

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.